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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Gaza Crisis

Key stories in the media:

Leading media reported that yesterday PM Ehud Olmert sent a message to a number of world leaders that Israel wants to see a diplomatic move through Egypt that would lead to a cessation of arms-smuggling into Gaza, before the Gaza operation enters its third phase. The Jerusalem Post and other media quoted PM Olmert as saying yesterday

that the Security Council Resolution passed on Friday calling for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza was a source of embarrassment for Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who helped prepare it but ultimately was ordered to back down from voting for it and abstain. Media also cited Olmert's claim that the blow delivered to Hamas is unprecedented.

All media quoted Hamas PM Ismail Haniyeh as saying yesterday in a televised speech that his organization would cooperate with initiatives for a cease-fire and an opening of the crossings in Gaza. However, Haniyeh said that Hamas would also continue to fight against the Occupation forces of Israel. An Israel Radio commentator noted that Haniyeh did not use the term Qcease-fire, which is widely cited in the Israeli media.

Major media quoted President Bush as saying yesterday that QIsrael has a right to defend herself. I am for a sustainable cease-fire. And a definition of a sustainable cease-fire is that Hamas stops firing rockets into Israel.... The choice is Hamas's to make. The Jerusalem Post reported that some in Israel are wondering whether Bush's support for Israel during these last years has been only rhetoric. Israel Radio said that presumptive Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's Senate confirmation hearings will give an indication of the Obama administration's foreign policy intentions.

Israel Radio reported that an IDF officer was wounded in a booby-trapped house. Media reported yesterday that one IDF soldier was injured seriously and three others lightly by friendly fire.

Israel Radio reported that UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon will come to the region today in an effort to promote a cease-fire. The Jerusalem Post quoted Western diplomatic sources as saying that Turkey is playing a key role in the talks because Hamas -- due to its tensions with Egypt -- currently has more confidence in Turkey than it does in Egypt.

The media reported that yesterday the Knesset Central Elections Committee (CEC) disqualified Arab parties Balad (National Democratic Assembly) and United Arab List (UAL) from running in February's elections. The CEC overwhelmingly accused those parties of incitement, supporting terrorist groups, and refusing to recognize Israel's right to exist. Major media assessed that the High Court of Justice is unlikely to uphold the ban.

Maariv reported that Israel is active in two channels in efforts to plug the arms smuggling through the Philadelphia corridor: through Egypt and through the U.S./NATO. The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that yesterday Defense Minister Director General Pinchas Buchris made an unplanned trip to Washington for talks with the Pentagon about a wide range of issues, including the Iranian nuclear threat and the ongoing IDF operation. Buchris will also ask the Americans for technical information on a rapid-fire cannon it is interested in purchasing to protect strategic installations from Qassam rockets.

HaQaretz and Yediot quoted the American human rights organization Human Rights Watch as saying this week that Israel is making illegal use of phosphor bombs in Gaza. Israel Radio quoted IDF Chief-of-Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi as saying before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that the IDF only uses internationally accepted weapons.

The Jerusalem Post cited Attorney General Menachem Mazuz's warning that Israel was preparing for a wave of international lawsuits related to IDF operations in Gaza.

Maariv and The Jerusalem Post reported that the IDF intends to set up a field hospital for Palestinians.

Israel Radio and other media reported that this morning shots were fired at Israeli border policemen from across the Jordanian border. The radio cited Jordan's denial of the incident.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday, mounting their fifth attempt to enter the Free Gaza group -- an organization of pro-Palestinian activists that opposes the ongoing blockade of Gaza -- departed Cyprus, carrying humanitarian supplies, doctors, lawyers, and 16 journalists from international news organizations.

Reporters from Sky News-TV, the BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera-TV, and Spain's El Mundo newspaper are among some of the boat's media-affiliated passengers. The Jerusalem Post also blasted what it said was universal negative media coverage of the Gaza operation, particularly by TIME Magazine and The Miami Herald.

Leading media reported that thousands of people demonstrated in support of Israel on Manhattan's 42nd Street on Sunday. Media reported that scuffles broke out between Palestinian supporter and counter-demonstrators in Times Square.

Maariv reported that academics in Ontario have decided to boycott Israel.

Haaretz reported that 300,000 illegal foreign workers are now in Israel, reaching the level attained before the large-scale expulsion early in this decade.

Maariv and The Jerusalem Post quoted Russian politician Garry Kasparov as saying in a Wall Street Journal article that Russian PM Vladimir Putin is exacerbating Israel's conflicts with the Arabs and Iran in order to save Russia from an economic collapse that could jeopardize his status.

Leading media reported that preliminary tests show that there is natural gas in the sandy layer beneath the sea floor at the Tamar offshore drill site, 90 km west of Haifa.

Haaretz reported that the America Israel Cultural Foundation is in danger of closing following the loss of \$30 million of its endowment to the Madoff fraud.

Gaza Crisis:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QAs the days pass, there is growing concern that Operation Cast Lead is undergoing a process of politicization, and that the internal power struggles are undermining the ability of the transition government to reach an agreement.

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz: QI feel sorry for the people of Gaza, but I feel even sorer for the civilian population of southern Israel, which has been bombarded by rockets for the last eight years.

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QInstead of seeking an exit strategy, [Olmert] is seeking a success strategy -- to continue to expand the military pressure.

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote in Yediot Aharonot: QOf course Israel can win.... [But] we don't want to win. Official Israel does not want to wipe out the Hamas government in Gaza.

Security and intelligence affairs commentator Amit Cohen wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QWhat might be construed as public differences of opinion or cracks in Hamas unity attests more accurately to the doublespeak, the double game that Hamas is playing.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: Q[Egypt] must, finally, overcome its inhibitions vis-a-vis its own Islamists and take real action to stop arms trafficking. Alternatively, it must allow an empowered multi-national military presence on its soil to do the job.

Amnon Rubinstein, Law Professor at the Interdisciplinary Center and a former education minister from Meretz, wrote in The Jerusalem Post: QThe Security Council's decision was good for Israel and we foolishly missed it.

Block Quotes:

II. "The Danger of Politicization"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (1/13): QAs the days pass, there is growing concern that Operation Cast Lead is undergoing a process of politicization, and that the internal power struggles are undermining the ability of the transition government to reach an agreement.... Despite the excessive use of force, which is inflicting heavy losses and damage to the civilian population in the Strip, the operation is garnering a consensus among public opinion makers. The government and most of the opposition supported the war against Hamas, and they expressed the widespread feeling among the public that this is an Qinvoluntary war,Q whose objectives are defined and agreed upon. This pervasive mood, which has followed the combat troops and has eased the burden on the residents on the home front, has grown more potent in light of the readiness on the part of the decision-makers to disassociate the war from the election campaign and to put off criticizing their colleagues until quieter days prevail. Only now a row has plowed through the barrier of silence, and the settling of political scores has begun on the backs of IDF soldiers and residents of the south, as if there were no tomorrow. The shrill voices need to be cast aside in favor of the formulation of a responsible, sober policy, which will yield a cease-fire as soon as possible.

II. "Strong Nerves and Crocodile Tears"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz (1/13): QI feel sorry for the people of Gaza, but I feel even sorrier for the civilian population of southern Israel, which has been bombarded by rockets for the last eight years.... I feel sorry for the Color Red sirens that send our citizens on a mad dash for shelters, if there are any, in the hopes of finding cover within 15 seconds. I feel sorry about the homes that have been damaged, the cities that have been drained of their citizens and the schools hit by rockets that were miraculously empty at the time.... If Israel had not acted now, we would have woken up one morning to find missiles in Tel Aviv, special delivery from Iran via the Philadelphia tunnels. Operation Cast Lead is not a reprisal raid but a defensive war meant to clip Hamas's wings before it surprises us with a Palestinian version of the Yom Kippur War. It's not our fault we have a strong, well-run army and state-of-the-art weaponry. What did Hamas think? That we were going to sit around twiddling our thumbs forever?.... Operation Cast Lead is one of the most justified of Israel's wars, to use Ariel Sharon's turn of phrase.... The Hamas regime has lost its trappings. It has been exposed as an empty vessel in the eyes of the people who voted it into power. Its leaders are hiding, leaving the Palestinians in a lurch. One day they will pay for it, I'm sure. As for us, we have no objective reason to put pressure on the government right now. Despite the defense minister's cold feet, strong nerves are the army's ABCs, ensuring that every step is calculated with care and no irreversible mistakes are made as the reservists enter Gaza.

III. "Olmert's Move"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (1/13): QFrom the first day of the operation the decision-makers, including Barak and Livni, have been troubled by the question of how and when do we finish this thing. Olmert is now seeking to take a different route. Instead of seeking an exit strategy, he is seeking a success strategy -- to continue to expand the military pressure.... [At a meeting with mayors of southern cities yesterday, Ehud Olmert] spoke about the Qiron fist of the Israeli people.Q QWe will continue to strike with all our might,Q he promised. QThe fighting spirit in the people is enormous. The army is doing a wonderful job. The Shin Bet is doing a wonderful job. Now is the time in which willpower -- ours and theirs -- is measured.Q Something has happened to him in between the speech that he delivered to the cabinet on the eve of the operation, a glum speech that was full of blood, sweat, and tears, and the stern and optimistic speech he gave yesterday. At the end, the mayors learned what he truly felt. QDon't expect any thanks or appreciation for your work,Q he said. QTwo years from now no one is going to remember.Q Why two years, one of them asked. Is there going to be another war in another two years?

IV. "Israel Doesn't Want to Win"

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote in Yediot Aharonot (1/13): QTIME Magazine contended this week that Israel could not defeat Hamas. As usual, TIME is wrong. Of course Israel can win. Hamas is not a mass national liberation movement of the Palestinian people: it is a tiny Islamic-fascist organization that forcibly took over a desperate region and turned it into the nightmare of an Islamic state. Is there no efficient way to defeat Hamas? There is. For example, for every Qassam rocket fired from the Gaza Strip, bomb Hamas headquarters in Damascus. For example, for every Qassam rocket at Israel, assassinate a Hamas leader, either a military one or a QcivilianQ one. Israel put down the second Intifada not by bombing cities and neighborhoods and Palestinian refugee camps, but by the gradual and systematic assassination of those who led terror. Back then, we wanted to win. Now, we don't want to win. Official Israel does not want to wipe out the Hamas government in Gaza. Even though the entire world, including the Arab world, has given us permission to do this. It even begged us to do this, on condition that an ocean of Palestinian blood not be spilled. But we are disappointing them: We are both spilling an ocean of blood and not intending to win. Perhaps because of the upcoming elections, who knows.... The Israeli leadership is making an historic mistake, which could be fatal. This is a cancerous growth that has to be removed in time.... If we don't defeat Hamas now, but only Qrespond savagelyQ and take punitive action -- not with intent but in deed -- against the Palestinian civilian population, Israelis will be considered savages that have no place among civilized people, and Hamas will emerge the winner.

IV. QSofter Tone, Same Content

Security and intelligence affairs commentator Amit Cohen wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (1/13): QWhen Ismail Haniyeh began his speech yesterday, one might have forgotten that just a few hours before Hamas had threatened to derail the entire process. Within a very short period of time the Hamas leaders presented conflicting positions. While the delegation to Cairo, to which representatives from Gaza were also party, scornfully rejected the Egyptian initiative, the Hamas prime minister in Gaza, Haniyeh, announced that he embraced that initiative warmly. But what might be construed as public differences of opinion or cracks in Hamas unity attests more accurately to the doublespeak, the double game that Hamas is playing.... If Hamas agrees to an unconditional cease-fire, the damage that will be caused to its image will set it back by years. That is why Hamas, even though it is eager for a cease-fire, feels that it is more important for it to achieve a cease-fire from a position of power or, at the very least, to be in a position in which the Gazan public will believe the lie.

VI. QEgypt at the Crossroads

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (1/13): QHosni Mubarak's regime failed to make the cessation of smuggling its own priority. While on the one hand, it didn't want Hamas to grow ever stronger, it didn't, on the other hand, want to be seen as collaborating with Jerusalem against Hamas. Trying to have it both ways has now come back to bite the regime. It inadvertently helped create the explosive situation that forced Israel into Operation Cast Lead. Egypt is in a bind. Its own national interest isn't far from Israel's, yet it dare not inflame its domestic Islamist opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood, which is closely tied to Hamas. It is understandably loath to allow a free flow of Gazans -- who might have Brotherhood or Iranian ties and stir up more unrest inside Egypt. Keeping the current situation on a low flame may strike Egypt as the least distasteful of a poor menu of choices. Yet it is a recipe for further bloodshed. If the Philadelphi Corridor isn't permanently secured, another -- worse -- round of warfare is inevitable. It would leave Hamas approaching Hizbullah in strength and posing an even greater risk of destabilization within Egypt. Egypt stands at a fateful crossroads. It must, finally, overcome its inhibitions vis-a-vis its own Islamists and take real action to stop arms trafficking. Alternatively, it must allow an empowered multi-national military presence on its soil to do the job. Either way, Egypt ought to desire the most effective supervisory mechanism, one it can oversee and coordinate, thereby cementing its status as regional leader.

VII. QSaying QNoQ Was a Mistake

Amnon Rubinstein, Law Professor at the Interdisciplinary Center and a former education minister from Meretz, wrote in The Jerusalem Post (1/13): QLast Friday, the Security Council decided by a vote of 14 for and one (U.S.) abstention on an immediate and durable cessation of hostilities. Almost instinctively, the Israeli cabinet said 'no' to the decision. Had Israel accepted the decision, there would have been two possibilities: The Hamas would either accept it and cease its shelling or, alternatively, it would have ignored the decision and continue to target Israel's south. In the latter case, the war would have continued, but the burden for its continuation would fall squarely and directly on Hamas, a criminal organization which is responsible for the war in the first place. Israel would have improved her international standing, which was gravely hurt both in public opinion and among friendly governments who sponsored the decision. On the other hand, had Hamas accepted the decision and would have stopped its rockets, this would have been a victory for Israel. After all, it was for this purpose that the whole military operation came into being. True: Hamas would have declared victory, but this would happen anyway.... Most important, the Council's decision gave Israel a good point of exit from the war. The head of IDF Intelligence described the situation in Gaza: QThe leadership is paralyzed; Hamas military arm evades battle and there are cracks in Hamas' position.Q This may be an overstatement, but even if partially true, what better time for Israel to accept a cease-fire proposal and concentrate on arrangements and guarantees which would prevent the smuggling of arms from Egypt into Gaza? One cannot think of a better, more opportune point of exit. Actually, the Security Council's decision was good for Israel and we foolishly missed it.

CUNNINGHAM